The Environment Centre N.T. Inc.

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WHO'S PLAYING RUSSIAN ROULETTE IN TIMOR GAP

Today the Environment Centre of the Northern Territory expressed grave concern at the Federal Government's readiness to initiate exploitation of the oil and gas potential of Timor Gap. Timor Gap is an area of ocean stretching North West of Darwin to East Timor. A bill relating to the commencement of offshore oil exploitation in Timor Gap is set to be tabled in the first sitting of Federal Parliament next week.

Spokesperson for the Environment Centre NT, Matthew Jamieson said today, "The Australian Government is playing Russian roulette in the Timor Gap. We are concerned of the potential for catastrophic oil spills, direct pollution from the oil rigs, and increases in fossil fuel emissions and greenhouse effects, together with our sense of social responsibility to not benefit from the misfortunes of the people of East Timor."

"It is totally unacceptable for the Australian Governemnt to join their Indonesian counterparts in this project, and by their actions condone the 1975 invasion of East Timor and the subsequent subversion of democratic freedoms and human rights violations."

"By moving to contravene international law in exploiting Timor Gap, an area still considered by the United Nations to be administered by Portugal, Australians will suffer the condemnation of the international community."

"It seems that, as the World moves toward peace, Australia is supporting Indonesia which has stepped up military activity to suppress the Timorese people."

"By exploiting the Timor Gap, the Government risks oil spills which will have massive environmental impacts on marine and coastal ecbsystems in Northern Australia, Timor and Indonesia."

"There is always a probability that an oil well will blow. Every since the major spill at Santa Barbara, California in 1969, oil drilling has resulted in spills. Even in the North Sea of Europe where regulations are tight, spills have repeatedly occured."

"If there is a major spill either from a oil drilling platform or a vessel, there is no known way to contain it in the open ocean. The major spills from the EXXON VALDEZ off Alaska and the KHARG 5 off Morocco last year proved oil-combatment equipment and technologies can not cope."

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"The loss of the bulk ore carrier, ALEXANDER P off North West Cape in March, only 6 weeks ago, just proves how treacherous our northern seas can be and the real risks posed by oil cargos."

"Oil platforms are not without their share of pollutants. The drilling mud used in boring is toxic, chemical effluents and sewage from rigs are discharged into the ocean, all of which severely impact on life in the vicinity of oil rigs."

"Burning of oil and other fossil fuels is a major contribution to greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Exploitation of Timor Gap will only help increase these emissions."

"Unless the Federal Government, Industry and the Community act to limit greenhouse gas emmissions and not promote further exploitation fossil fuels we must expect a cycle of increasing environmental catastrophy as the Greenhouse Effect is exacerbated. Instead we must pursue policies to reduce energy demand, increase energy efficiency and begin environmentally constructive industries like biomass recycling."

For further information contact Matthew Jamieson at the Environment Centre NT on 089-812532 or 089 811984.